DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 153 659 IR 006 055

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TITLE The Impact of Nonverbal Communications on the Public Services Functions of Libraries.
PUB DATE 76
NOTE 9p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Annotated Bibliographies; Behavior; *Librarians; *Libraries; *Library Services; Library Technicians; *Nonverbal Communication
IDENTIFIERS *Users (Library)

ABSTRACT

This annotated, selected bibliography of 21 monographs and articles on non-verbal communication is designed to help library personnel develop their perceptions of body language, thereby helping them respond more appropriately to user queries. Introductory material includes a brief literature review. (MBR)

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THE IMPACT OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATIONS ON THE PUBLIC SERVICES FUNCTIONS OF LIBRARIES

by

Kay Weiss

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THE IMPACT OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATIONS ON THE

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While nonverbal communication has been occuring since the world began, the study of this form of communicating has been done systematically in only recent times. In preparing this bibliography it seemed imperative to choose tools which would have particular value to library workers because, while there has been a wealth of publications on kinesics (body language) in recent years, much of it is too superficial or too technical to be of value to a non-specialized practitioner.

Muñoz defines nonverbal behavior as those actions which are distinct from speech, such as "facial expression, hand and arm gestures, positions,

postures, and various movements of the body or the legs and feet" (p. 220). It seems important for librarians and library workers to be familiar with these ways of communicating for two reasons. First, Birdwhistell's studies indicate that as much as 65% of the meaning of a message sent is conveyed nonverbally. When a user approaches with a need, if the staff member is "tuned-in" to the nonverbal as well as to the verbal query it may be possible to achieve greater satisfaction for both parties when dealing with the expressed request. "Where are the encyclopedias?" may be perceived as more than a directional question if the hesitancy of the patron or some other need is conveyed by a facial expression or posture. A perceptive staff member can then offer a response appropriate to the situation.

Secondly, if staff members understand the importance of nonverbal communication, they will be more aware of the messages they send to other workers and to patrons. Ellison and Molenda feel that "approachability and positive interaction may be the only elements which determine the librarian's success" (p. 214). Because it is not usually possible to keep all extremities and muscles under conscious control, nonverbal communications are relatively free from distortion and more accurately indicate the feelings and emotions of the message sender. The speed with which these cues are sent and received also makes nonverbal communication highly efficient. But this very immediacy puts an additional burden on the library employee to be aware of personal movement; a step back may signal dislike to an individual who approaches in good faith.

This brings us to another aspect of nonverbal communication that affects libraries and users -- personal space needs. Conversational distance as it is observed in the Arab world is too close for comfort for

the English. The friendly patting and touching among individuals of Latin heritage would be regarded as invasion of personal territory by those of Germanic or Anglo-Saxon descent. It seems important, then, that library planners should be aware not only of the ways in which different ethnic groups perceive space but also of some of the reactions of individuals to the spaces around them in order to facilitate advantageous use of public and staff spaces.

The many facets of noverbal communication have begun to be explored more extensively in recent years. Body Language, by Julius Fast popularized contemporary knowledge current at that time about the messages humans convey by the ways they stand, sit, use gestures and eye movements, etc. In his introduction to Body Language and Social Order, however, Scheflen cautions against ascribing certain meanings to certain actions. "We often ignore the determining role of cultural, social, economic and political processes in human affairs" (p. xiii). He feels that we should not forget to examine "facial expression, posture, body movement and touch in relation to language and the larger contexts of group processes and the social order as a whole" (p. xiii).

This bibliography attempts to note selected monographs and articles which are likely to be of particular interest to librarians and library workers. While the annotations are fairly brief, it is hoped that they will provide insight into the selection process used in the compilation of this listing. Exclusion from this list does not imply inappropriateness but rather an emphasis of text that seemed unsuitable to the present need.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ashcraft, Norman and Albert Scheflen. People Space: The Making and Breaking of Human Boundaries. Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press/ Doubleday, 1976.

An exploration of the space needs of people in various cultures, how different people respond to crowding, and ideas for adapting to varied space needs.

Beier, Ernst G. and Evans G. Valens. People-reading: How We Control Others, How They Control Us. New York: Stein & Day, 1975.

Discusses patterns of control: blaming, withdrawal, parenting, etc. This book has several good chapters on the art of listening.

Birdwhistell, Ray L. Kinesics and Context: Essays on Body Motion Communication. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970.

The classic work in the field. This is the scholarly and scientific explanation of how nonverbal communication works and is observed.

Bosmajian, Haig A. The Rhetoric of Nonverbal Communication: Readings. Glenview, Illinois: Scott Foresman, 1971.

Designed as a text for use with speech classes, this collection of articles explores areas such as rock music, topless dancing, picketing, black armband protests, and other nonverbal phenomena.

Boucher, Virginia. "Nonverbal Communication and the Library Reference Interview." RQ, 16:1 (Fall, 1976) pp. 27-32.

A thorough examination of the kinesics present in a "typical" reference interview. Techniques for making the user more comfortable are suggested.

Davis, Flora. Inside Intuition: What We Know About Nonverbal Communication. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973.

A good introductory work about many areas of nonverbal communication. It is more thorough and well-documented than Body Language, by Fast.

Ellison, J. W. and Claudia Molenda. "Making Yourself Approachable." New Library World, 77:917 (November, 1976) pp. 214-215.

Suggestions for increasing the patrons' perceptions of the approachability of the employees in a library situation.

Fast, Julius. Body Language. New York: Evans, 1970.

Popular treatment of the field of nonverbal communication. Tends to be over-simplified, but it is a good introduction for general readers.

Harrison, Randall P. Beyond Words: An Introduction to Nonverbal Communication. Englewood Cliff, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974.

A textbook offering a practical overview of nonverbal communication so the reader can learn some of the skills of interpretation. It includes a glossary and an annotated bibliography.

Kazlauskas, Edward. "An Exploratory Study: A Kinesic Analysis of Academic Library Public Service Points." Journal of Academic Librarianship, 2:3 (July, 1976) pp. 130-134.

A study conducted in California university libraries substantiating earlier studies by Swope and Shosid.

Key, Mary Ritchie. Paralanguage and Kinesics. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1975.

A thorough discussion of many aspects of nonverbal communication and paralinguistics. An extensive bibliography is appended.

Leathers, Dale G. Nonverbal Communication Systems. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1976.

A scholarly study of different types of nonverbal communication. Sample tests, photographs, etc. help to clairy nonverbal patterns observed in daily life.

Lynch, Kevin. The Image of the City. Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1960.

A discussion of individuals' perceptions of the physical features of the world around them. While Lynch's analysis is directed at geographers and city planners, his thesis can be important both for planning the interior of a library and for choosing a site for a new library building.

McGarry, K. J. Communication Knowledge and the Librarian. London: Bingley, 1975.

Chapter 4 discusses aspects of nonverbal communication which are of particular importance and interest to librarians.

Mehrabian, Albert. Public Places and Private Spaces: The Psychology of Work, Play, and Living Environments. New York: Basic Books, 1976.

Discussion of external influences on individuals when they respond to particular stimuli. Libraries are discussed in a chapter which considers the effects of color, furniture placement, and the technological revolution on services and patron response.

Muñoz, Joanna López. "The Significance of Nonverbal Communication in the Reference Interview." RQ, 16:3 (Spring, 1977) pp. 220-224.

Designed to "examine the significance of nonverbal communication and then to relate it directly to the reference interview." The various aspects of this scientific field are treated concisely.

Scheflen, Albert. Body Language and Social Order: Communication as Behavior Control. Englewood Cliff, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972.

Many photographs illustrate this discussion of nonverbal behavior as both a form of communication and as a form of behavior control useful with individuals and groups.

Schwartz, Tony. The Responsive Chord. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1973.

Examines the way human responses can be manipulated by verbal and nonverbal communication. While Schwartz is concerned primarily with mass media and Madison Avenue, he provides some interesting insight into human relationships, unexpressed insecurities, etc.

Shosid, Norma J. "Freud, Frug, and Feedback." Special Libraries, 57:8 (October, 1966) pp. 561-563.

While is not a particularly recent article, the problems of communicating with library patrons have not really changed.

Swope, Mary Jane and Jeffrey Katzer. "Why Don't They Ask Questions?" RQ, 12:2 (Winter, 1972) pp. 161-166.

Reports on a study at Syracuse University to identify barriers preventing patrons from asking for aid or requesting information.

Thompson, James J. Beyond Words: Nonverbal Communication in the Classroom. New York: Citation, 1973.

The chapters on personal space, work space, and the psychological effects of color on individuals can be particularly provocative reading for library personnel who are planning new or remodeled library quarters.